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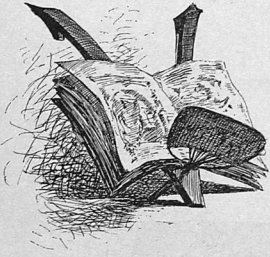
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THE DECORATION OF CITY HOUSES.

BY RALPH A. CRAM.

PART THREE—THE DINING-ROOM.



ERY curious is the proclivity for eating and drinking on the faintest provocation, which, in its present elaborate perfection, is quite the property of the nineteenth century, although the passion has weighty precedent in the history of the decay

of Rome. As it stands now it is a blemish, a very animal detail, exaggerated into unwonted importance, unjustifiable, unworthy. It is, however, a fact, and must be accepted as such, for the feeding mania has raised the dining-room to a very unusual eminence in the house, and its decoration becomes at once fraught with extremest difficulty. The entire *raison d'être* of a dining-room is gross—essentially so, nothing can hide this, and now that every happening of joy or grief, congratulation or consolation, welcome or farewell, becomes a reason for eating, the duty of the conscientious decorator comes to be the labor of finding out how best to counteract the material tendency of this custom by means of judicious arrangement of the room, and the choice of color and form. Further, his province does not extend; much as he might wish to make his decorative agents merely subordinates and the chief counteractions to grossness, delicacy and fineness of food, subtle and poetic associations and the divertissement of emotional and mental food, he must depend alone on his control over the mere surroundings for his warfare against all that is gross, animal, unmental and unesthetic in the process of convivial eating.

For in calm fact this is the chief consideration in dining-room decoration, to make the room mental, not physical, to subtly change a necessary and unbeautiful process into what will finally take its place as a reason for conviviality, *mental* eating, not physical. For to those who look with a certain dismay on indiscriminate eating, it must seem entirely clear that the present custom of considering only the physical man is an outgrowth of the times, and equally clear and inevitable that it must now give way to a higher and more ideal custom of considering chiefly the intellectual man. With this most desirable revolution, the dining-room would become wholly a private place, like the sleeping apartments, and eating, like sleeping, a necessary hunger of the body, would come to be a duty to be performed in privacy. For in actual fact it would be quite as reasonable for a number of individuals to get together and proceed to sleep as it is for them to collectively eat. In the meantime, however, it becomes needful to make the best of the pre-eminence of the dining-room and accept it as an accomplished fact.

Thus, the one object to hold in view in dining-room decoration is its elevation above the material, and to this end purity and strength of design, delicacy and intricacy of detail, clearness and calmness of color, and the use of all manner of works of decorative art are most efficient. Strength and purity of design are of course desirable everywhere, but it has become a fashion of late to choose some one of the English Renaissance styles for use here, which are all things but strong and pure, chiefly, we regret to say, the Jacobean, a style which is entirely barbarous and has nothing whatever to recommend it to any rare parvenus. Frowning and ominous massiveness is not necessarily the adjunct of a dining-room. It has, indeed, a certain connection with roast beef and chops, but as we are dealing with the question how best to counteract the effect of this sort of thing, it becomes plain that we are not to allow roast beef and chops to strike the key note of decoration. Instead of great weight and solidity, it seems that the dining-room should be entirely in harmony with the rest of the house, precisely the same in style—for the system of designing each room in a different style is purely and distinctively barbarous,—yet simple in its parts and very quiet. An entire wood finish is, as everyone knows, admirable in effect, when plain and strong, but possibly a frieze of embossed leather or woven stuff, particularly of Oriental, Persian or Turcoman, gives a richer and freer effect. It is unnecessary to state that white is banished resolutely from the room. Care should be taken that if the floor is of hard wood, a center and subordinate rugs shall

be so arranged as to prevent any stepping on the hard and clattering floor, for silence is indispensable here. Another point that should be carefully considered is the necessity of shutting out entirely all suggestion of the outer world, by filling the windows with colored glass. There is not the slightest need of clear glass in any room of a city house, and most especially here. One can see nothing without, save the affairs of others, and subtle and beautiful color and lovely design are far more gracious to look upon than are gray and dirty streets, clattering carriages and hurrying people, or, peradventure, back yards. It would, indeed, be well to have each window in the house fitted with painted glass set in casement sashes with ordinary plain glass windows behind.

With regard to the objects wherewith to decorate the dining-room and afford a higher degree of food, it seems that all that has *external* beauty is desirable—fragments of art work from the Orient and from medieval Europe, of such nature as may please the owner. We remember seeing advanced, some time ago, a very curious and interesting formula, something like this: that nothing in art work, which actually or in design dated later than the style of the room itself was permissible. That is, that in a room of the style of Louis Quatorze, a Sévres vase, or a work of the time of Louis Seize, or the Empire, was utterly out of the question, though François Premier work was quite the thing. Now this idea is based on the very false assumption that we must deceive ourselves into the belief when we are in a Jacobean room that we are Jacobean, and that if we are so fortunate as to have a Pompeian room in the house, we must on entering become of the second century. Anything, so long as it is beautiful, is allowable, and the slightest tendency towards locating a room in a certain period is culpable and deserving of harshest censure. Of course, work of a rude and passionate age—twelfth century for example,—would scarcely be placed close to work of the Renaissance, and care would be taken that the impression of the room should not be marred by unsympathetic ornament; that is, a drawing-room would seldom admit rude pottery as ornaments, but only delicate and outwardly beautiful forms; while work of the Italian Renaissance, ivory carving of exquisitely chased metalwork would be out of place in an entrance hall. The true principle on which to work in decoration by means of bric-à-brac is not the preservation of the idea of a certain period, a chronological arrangement, as it were, but harmony of *motives* and *idea* in the art work selected. Of course the nature of the idea chosen will depend upon the owner, as to whether the decoration on a certain room shall be rude and massive, or dainty and refined, but the lines which define the nature of the drawing-room, and the halls seem pretty clearly defined.

It hardly seems as if pictures were exactly adapted to dining-room decoration, particularly if their value is other than decorative, as should always be the case. A picture that has within it some subtle and lovely thought must be lived with constantly and demands a study and attention other than the desultory interest afforded in a dining-room. Pictures of purely decorative value may be entirely appropriate, but the ancient and barbarous system of hanging studies of fruit and game on the walls has happily become only a bitter memory. The infinitely more vulgar custom of placing stuffed game under hemispheres of glass and using these mortuary remains for decorative purposes, is a modern fancy that shows very plainly how deep-seated is the present craze for art. It may be laid down as an inevitable rule that any suggestion of food in dining-room decoration, in carving, wood ornaments, or pictures, is permissible only in the room of a house whose owner lives to eat.

To speak of table furnishings would be to enter upon an endless study. The absurd laws of fashion are unusually arbitrary here, and the idea of actual, unvarying beauty rarely comes into consideration. If glass cut into heavy crystals happens to be the thing, all eyes are closed at once to its infinite ugliness. We can only warn the unwary against the vulgarity of this kind of glass; the beauty of thin, crisp Venetian work, the loveliness of color in crystal; against the unmitigated horror of most modern silverwork, and the barbarity of very much porcelain and china, chiefly that which is moulded after the notorious "White House Set." One would have thought that realism in decoration was killed long ago. Really the safest way for those of the means to furnish a table is to depend wholly on past centuries, for the work then, even in evil times such as the Georgian and Louis Seize eras, was good and true compared with much that we have now.

In the design which accompanies this article, the woodwork is like nearly all the first floor, of

wax-stained, this time a warm, rich brown, and picked out here and there with dead silver and dull blue-green. The wide frieze or wall above is of a heavy tapestry-like stuff, the color effect of which is blue-green, of nearly the same tone as the woodwork. Its rich and glowing effect is obtained by the use of minute touches of pure and brilliant color rather than by wood surface of subdued color. Of course the brown of the woodwork is worked all through the frieze, as is also the dead silver, changing here to brilliant silver. The floor is of plain oak, still darker than the wainscot and the center carpet is of Morris manufacture, truly good Oriental work being now so rare. The darkest effect in the room, is the blue-green suggested here and there, but the general tone is a deep-glowing, crimson brown and dull green, neutral and unobtrusive. The stone work of the fireplace is of dark green stone. In the windows is concentrated all the color of the room, the lower sashes being filled with pale golden glass, opalescent and of varying shades, the prevailing tone being sea-green and green-blue. The upper sashes are filled with glass of the most glowing colors, golden and green and blue and the subtle red that Burne Jones uses. The draperies are of harmonious shades of browns and blue-greens, and the bric-à-brac is so arranged as to carry out the color composition. The furniture is of black oak, upholstered with dark green leather. The metal work is of wrought iron with silver beaten in, after an ancient Persian fashion. Thus it will be seen that the effect, though dark and rich, is neither gloomy on the one hand not hot and exciting on the other, but restful and to a certain degree intellectual not sensuous, a result that should always be held in mind.

WALL AND CEILING DECORATION.

(See illustration on page 145.)

THE wall and ceiling design that appears on page 145 is reproduced from a drawing by Artmann & Fechteler, the well-known artists in relief and fresco, and represents a happy blending of three styles of decoration. The one serving to lighten the other. The panels in fresco are composed of mythological figures, exquisitely drawn and painted, with sky effects for the backgrounds. The relief immediately surrounding these panels may be so treated as to resemble a finely grained wood, an antique metal, or a combination of both. Indeed, the variety of possible treatment is infinite, and a room decorated in this manner may be so renovated from time to time as to present an entirely new appearance. Only capable and experienced modelers are employed to reproduce in relief the details of the design, and so skillful are they, that it is often difficult to detect their work from the most elaborate carving. The painting is in keeping with the modeling, and the general result is exceptionally artistic decoration of the highest class. It lacks the meretriciousness, which, even in our day, though less now than formerly, distinguishes much of the so-called art that disfigures the walls and ceilings of our homes.

The frieze and cove may be in imitation of wood, or metal, or delicate but warm colors with the metallic effects appreciable, but in a subdued form. The large panels of the walls themselves should be in deep rich oils, and the relief separating these panels, imitation of wood with metallic ornamentation. The panels of the wainscoting should be similarly decorated. An example of the relief work of this firm may be seen at the gallery of Fredericks, the photographer. The lofty ceiling of the large room on the ground floor is covered with a deep relief and the walls with a lighter pattern. Its decoration indicates in a marked degree a departure from conventional methods, and has been very favorably noticed by the press.

NEW METALLIC COLORS.—Decorators are ever ready to welcome an accession of force in the way of new material. The new metallic colors imported by an eminent color house with home office in this city, and which are especially applicable to textiles, including even such surfaces as velvet plush, have a rich metallic hue, free from any insensibility appearance, and, when laid, seem to partake of the softness and depth of the material. To this is added a certain translucency, which, in the case of leaves, flowers and fruit, allows of a marvelously close rendering. We have seen the surface of a corrugated water-melon imitated in these colors to the life, and with a brilliancy reminding one of a phosphorescent paint. Hand-painted work with them on portières and window hangings is likely to be more admired than woven patterns. The colors are put up in cakes in an elegant mahogany box.

